

Animal Health Safeguarding Review Implementation Progress Report November 2003

I. Progress achieved in implementing the review:

Surveillance

- Progress on national animal identification plan – With support from the United States Animal Health Association, the U.S. Animal Identification Plan continues to move forward. A pre-rule publication developed by the 100 member State/Federal/industry team is available for comment until December 31st. Safeguarding Review recommendation #128 calls for the development of a comprehensive animal identification system that takes into consideration state and regional animal production methods.
- International wildlife disease surveillance – APHIS Wildlife Services and International Services personnel met with representatives from Mexico's Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Health, and Ministry of the Environment and National Resources to discuss wildlife disease surveillance along the US-Mexican border. Representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pan American Health Organization were also in attendance. Participants agreed to establish a regional disease reporting system involving the six Mexican border states. APHIS and CDC will support the Mexican government entities with equipment, training and supplies for a regional border laboratory and two reference labs. The initial focus of the reporting system will be on rabies but other wildlife diseases will be added in the future. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 113 and 135 address the role that wildlife play in disseminating diseases.

Response

- Carcass disposal – A mobile tissue digester was delivered to Wisconsin in late September. This digester will be utilized in Wisconsin and be available for transport to emergency operations sites. USDA funded the purchase of the digester and the state of Wisconsin funded the building at the Diagnostic Laboratory in Madison where the unit will be housed. The placement of this and other mobile tissue digesters addresses logistical needs for emergencies and is in keeping with Safeguarding Review recommendation #116 which calls for the development of a logistical support plan.
- State level agriculture vulnerability assessments – Georgia is working on an agriculture vulnerability assessment. Participating in the discussions are personnel from VS, the Georgia Department of Agriculture, and representatives from the emergency management, public health, and industry sectors.

Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 105, 111, and 123 call for continuing cooperative efforts to improve emergency response.

- Additional Area Emergency Management Coordinator (AEC) hired – VS has selected an AEC for Texas – New Mexico. This hire will bring to 10 the number of AECs placed within VS. Over the next several years, VS expects to place an AEC in each area office. AECs work with FEMA and other emergency response organizations and state regulatory agencies to coordinate emergency response planning and preparedness. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 105, 111, and 123 call for continuing cooperative efforts to improve emergency response.
- Forum on exposure and consequence assessment held – VS sponsored a two day forum in early November on exposure and consequence assessments. Representatives from across APHIS participated as did representatives of the USDA Office of Risk Assessment and Cost Benefit Analysis (ORACBA). Information was shared on current projects and future directions. Technical presentations were also made about particular projects including a number of computer models for simulating the spread of disease agents. Understanding consequences associated with foreign animal diseases assists in the design of plans for responding to disease incursions.

Exclusion

- Swine Health Protection Act training held in Puerto Rico – VS sponsored a training session November 3 – 6th in San Juan regarding the Swine Health Protection Act. Veterinarians and Animal Health Technicians from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands attended the training. (Puerto Rico has over 1,200 licensed garbage feeding operations.) Instruction was provided on the Act, biosecurity, foreign animal diseases transmitted by garbage, and traffic from the Dominican Republic. This training course was in keeping with a number of Safeguarding Review recommendations calling for improvements in APHIS' offshore disease exclusion activities.

Laboratory Systems

- Quality assurance program restructured at CVB – The Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) has recently restructured its Quality Assurance program. A Quality Assurance Section Leader was selected to document a quality program that encompasses all of the quality processes that are essential to the CVB program including activities not typically addressed by a laboratory quality accreditation program such as agent biosecurity and physical security. A Quality Assurance Section was also created within the CVB Inspection and Compliance Unit and Inspection Specialists have been assigned to assist the laboratory personnel in developing procedures and process documentation steps considered essential for good laboratory practices. QA leads and focus groups have also been established at the laboratory to evaluate and restructure processes to be consistent

with international quality assurance guidelines. Safeguarding Review recommendation #119 calls for developing and implementing a quality assurance and control system that meets or exceeds international standards.

Information Technology

- New information management system to be launched for the Center for Veterinary Biologics – VS is working toward a December 1st start date for implementing phase I of the Automated Information Management System – Licensing, Special Requests, Testing and Inspection System (AIMS-LSRTIS). Once in place, the new system will greatly enhance the ability of CVB to retrieve and organize data regarding biological products and establishments. This LSRTIS is a component of the overall AIMS effort. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations address making better use of technology and electronic availability of information (#s 77, 81).

Veterinary Accreditation

- Streamlining the process for approving accreditations – VS is implementing procedures which will allow quicker approvals of accreditation certificates. This procedural change will also allow VS to reduce the backlog of pending accreditation certificates. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 69, 101, 145, 146, and 147 call for VS to revise the accreditation program.

II. Implementation activities:

The Organizational Dynamics/Communications Issue Group will meet in Atlanta the week of December 15th and the Issue Group expects to complete work on one or more action plans at that meeting.

The Laboratory Systems Issue Group held a conference call in November and will be meeting the week of January 5th in Davis, California.

The Information Technology Issue Group held a conference call in November and will hold a conference call in December. A face to face meeting is being planned for late January/early February.

The Veterinary Accreditation Issue Group will be meeting in late January/early February.

The National Surveillance System Issue Group will hold a conference call on December 9th.

Comments and questions regarding this report can be directed to Carol Tuszynski at Area Code (970) 494-7320.

